



STRENGTHENING THE VOICES OF CASA STATEWIDE

INTERIM CHARGE #2 FOR THE HOUSE PUBLIC HEALTH COMMITTEE; HOW TEXAS IS PREPARING FOR STATE AND FEDERAL BUDGETARY CHANGES THAT IMPACT THE STATE'S HEALTH PROGRAMS, INCLUDING THE FAMILY FIRST PREVENTION SERVICES ACT

Texas CASA strongly supports efforts to improve the quality of care for all children in the foster care system.

One way to improve the health, safety and well-being of children and youth in foster care is to implement the best practices outlined in the Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA). A core piece of this federal law outlines how to raise the standard of care for children with high-needs in congregate care settings, such as Residential Treatment Centers (RTCs). In order for the state to maximize Title IV-E federal funding, these providers have to come into compliance with the FFPSA requirements by becoming Qualified Residential Treatment Providers (QRTPs). Texas CASA sees the implementation of FFPSA as a crucial opportunity for the state to financially incentivize foster care providers to elevate their standard of care for high-needs children.

Texas spends approximately \$26 million annually in Title IV-E funding to pay for the placement of high-needs children in RTCs. Although Texas relies heavily on these placement settings to meet capacity needs, the FFPSA aims to keep children in the most family-like setting during their time in foster care. It does so by limiting how much the federal government will reimburse states to keep children in a RTC beyond two weeks, while it places no limit on reimbursement for family-like foster care settings.

The challenge for Texas is that none of the state's congregate care placements currently meet new QRTP standards, making them ineligible for ongoing Title IV-E funding after October 1, 2021. If Texas does not require providers to become QRTPs, some may still choose to meet this higher standard of care. Texas CASA is concerned this will unintentionally lead to a two-tiered system of care where some children are in higher quality QRTP's and others remain in the unaccredited RTCs.

Another possibility for a two-tiered system could be created in the court system, which is required to provide additional oversight of children placed in QRTPs under FFPSA but not those unaccredited RTCs. For QRTP's to continue drawing down federal funds, child protection courts must work with independent assessors to determine the necessity of continued placement of children in these accredited facilities. Texas CASA supports this added accountability for child



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safety; however, we believe it should be required for all congregate care facilities, including those not yet accredited by FFPSA standards.

Texas CASA strongly supports many of the provisions and investments made by the Department of Family and Protective services to strengthen Prevention and Early Intervention services to come into compliance with other portions of the FFPSA. However, in order to elevate the quality of care for all children in foster care, Texas CASA recommends developing a rate structure that incentivizes RTCs to become accredited QRTPs and ensuring all children in congregate care can benefit from heightened court oversight for added safety and transparency.

We recommend the Legislature consider providing transitional funds to providers serving high-needs children in RTCs to prevent losing Title IV-E funding down the road.

Questions?

Please contact the Texas CASA Policy Team at – publicpolicy@texascasa.org